The Fourah Bay College Forest Reserve and the Threat to Monkeys and Other Mammals

A Call For Action

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Fourah Bay College was founded on Friday 18th of February in the year 1827 by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) as a theological and academic institution for training missionaries and public administrators to transport the enlightenment of the black race across Africa and beyond. It began operations in Cline Town, east of Freetown and later, in 1945, the college found its way up the hills of Mount Aureol. The new location was a densely forested mountainous region with a roaring sound that echoed across the Atlantic Ocean, prompting the Portuguese explorer, Pedro Da Cintra, in 1846 to refer to the entire location in Portuguese parlance as Sarra Loa, meaning Lion Mountain, from which the country's name Sierra Leone was birthed. The Mount Aureol forest was home of wide varieties of different genre cohabiting in harmony with nature and the natural habitat long before the Fourah Bay College was relocated to the area. The Botanical Forest is located is located westward of the college, stretching across a slopy gorge on the margin of Leicester Road as far as Tree Planting. Due to its nature, the forest was used principally as a botanical experimentation by the Biological Department of the college. The forest region was referred to by students of Fourah Bay College as "Monkey Library" due to their use of the forest cover for studying while anchoring up the trees like monkeys. The botanical forest in the early and later days, harboured large number of monkeys and other mammals, nurtured by its high humidity and serenity. The forest region was a bastion of diversified animal and plant ecosystem with very minimal human footprints. A natural water stream, now labeled "White Water", flows through the botanical forest, originating from the top of the mountain and catchments deep in the forest jungle and moves down until it drains into the ocean. On the eastwards of the college a vast horizontal expanse of forest area is still visible, stretching at the back of the male hostels, across settlements such as Kamanda Farm and Boil Water (a relatively new sprouted settlement). The college itself is sanguished in-between these two forest dispersals, with a road network slightly separating the two.

Due to the natural characteristic nature of the mountain forest, the African Green Monkey species have survived there for more than a century, long before Fourah Bay College appeared on the scene. The logical conclusion of the ghoulish civil war spanning eleven years, from 1991 to 2002, sparked an increased rural urban migration spree which commenced at the height of the inhuman brutality. This magnetic rush to the western area for safety and other possible opportunities created new misfortune for the forest region and the fate of the African Green Monkeys and other mammals. Several of the animals became extinct due to human actions. The quest for settlement building, fuelwood and charcoal production, fruits fending, and water sourcing resulted in the forceful drift of some of the finest mammals away from the botanical forest region with the extinction of others.

In the midst of this devastating onslaught, the African Green Monkeys have managed to survive and thrive in the Fourah Bay College/Mount Aureol forest. Yet, they live in the midst of fear in the company of humans most of whom have emerged from the rural areas where animal hunting and consumption is high.

With virtually no policy against hunting animals in the Mount Aureol forest, either by government or the college administration, the risk of these unique mammals is higher, especially as humans continue to deforest the region through fuelwood fetching and gardening.

Unlike the Takogama Chimpanzee estuary located some 8,000 meters from the Mount Aureol forest which is well protected, the home of these African Green Monkeys is volatile, and has not attracted any attention from authorities to consider protection measures.

Living in the company of these African Green Monkeys for nearly seven years, I have observed their movements along the two forest dispersals, and their interaction with other mammals including bird varieties, lizards, squirrels, snakes, snails, rodents and so many species. Typically, they move in groups of between five and ten in number, feasting on plants such as corn, cassava roots, yellow flowers of okra leaves, mangoes, and other fruit varieties located in the backyard of the residential building where I live. They also feed on palm kernel fruits found at the back of the Geography and Law buildings on the side of the Botanical Forest. They travel daily across the forest region, from the thickest part to the grassy area.

With increased student population at Fourah Bay College as a result of the Free Quality Education policy implemented by the New Direction government, and the rising population in the informal settlements along the forest margin, the fate of the African Green Monkeys and other mammals remains shrouded in mystery. The government and college administration must begin thinking about protection measures. The rumour of fencing the entire location should be pursued vigorously to ring-fence the land mass from poachers and other human threats in the near future.

Plans for future infrastructural developments to match the growing student population and other new advancements must be done with care and caution considering the position of the African Green Monkeys and mammals in the terrain. The African Green Monkeys have not known any second home in their entire generational lives. The Fourah Bay College forest reserve is the only place they call home. Action must be taken, and it should be taken now. There is no other better time. Animal lives matter!!